



Renewals of Space, Spirituality and Service

From the Executive Director

I've just celebrated six months as Executive Director of Fontbonne Ministries, and I'm delighted to contribute for the first time to this newsletter.

Time has flown by and I have been learning about our ministries, their remarkable work, and how they meet so many needs of people in the GTA. Fontbonne Ministries was established to respond to present day needs and is the continuation of a mission started by the Sisters of St. Joseph over 360 years ago in France.

The communities that we serve vary, but the ministries are all united under one mission: to support, engage and nurture participants and to create spaces where people feel they belong.

We often hear from participants and volunteers that our programs offer opportunities for renewal.

Just like springtime is nature's annual renewal, for us it can involve the restoration of physical well-being, social connections, self-confidence and a fresh way to look at one's life.

The stories in this issue are all about the unique ways that people experience renewal through our ministries.

— Ben Vozzolo

Rejuvenation at Fontbonne Place

She is a steady fixture and a blessing to her east-end neighbourhood. However, Sister Gwen Smith has recently made the decision to move.

Fontbonne Place opened in 2002 as a solution to the housing crunch with 18 rent-geared-to-income apartments. Eighteen years later, there is still a housing crunch and nearby St. Ann's Parish desperately needed a home for a new family sponsored from Syria.

In response, Sister Gwen, in consultation with the Sisters' congregational leader, volunteered to move. "The Parish refugee team had been frantically looking for affordable housing. As I engaged in my usual evening prayers, the thought came that I could move out and let the family live here."

Now two school-aged children and their parents are settling into life in Canada. Much is needed in terms of acclimation, schooling, language

classes and so on, but members of St. Ann's and the Sisters' communities are ready to lend a helping hand.

Sisters, staff, volunteers and participants of Mustard Seed also helped Sister Gwen with moving and tidying up for the new family. "The residents of Fontbonne Place were advised of the family moving in and encouraged to join us in welcoming them," says Sister Gwen. "They can empathize with the family in many ways."

Though the essence of Fontbonne Place remains, the addition of a young family adds depth and newness to this ministry. "I'm praying that this welcoming of others will touch the hearts of those who want to build walls and show them what they're missing," expresses Sister Gwen.

Photos Above: Fontbonne Place (left) and Sister Gwen Smith (right) outside her former home.

A Sense of Belonging

In a 2019 survey, [Faith Connections](#) asked participants to offer feedback on their needs and feelings regarding young adult ministries in the GTA.

“The responses show that young adults want ministries that give them a place to make friends and build community,” says Kat Ryba, Program Director. “And that

makes sense: there are many faith-oriented workshops for the 18 - 39 demographic, but there are not as many events for them to connect socially and feel a sense of belonging.”

Respondents also reported a desire for programming on spiritual discernment and the history of the Catholic Church. Faith Connections is eager to respond and has planned a number of discussions and workshops that will address these subjects.

In addition, there will be events like the recent *Murder Mystery Social* where 80 participants mingled with each other and with actors to roleplay in a 1920s crime drama. “This event had no theological component,” says Kat of the mystery evening, “and we’ll have similar events that don’t include a faith component but [invite people in and open the door to our community.](#)”

For Kat, the responses have been a source of inspiration for her. “Young adult needs change rapidly,” she explains. “This survey shows that Faith Connections wishes to reflect that change in our ministry and that we’re always seeking renewal and fresh ideas.”



Faith Connections' Murder Mystery Social event with a cast of actors.

Renewed by Service

For just over ten years, Sister Mary Halder has volunteered her time as a friendly visitor with [In Good Company](#).

While her experiences can sometimes be challenging, Sister Mary appreciates the impact she has had on her clients and the meaning and insight they have provided her.

“Being of assistance is important to me,” says Sister Mary, a Sister of Service. “I learn a lot from my clients, many of whom have the same concerns I do.”

One of Sister Mary’s clients has macular degeneration and, due to decreased eyesight, can be fearful about going out on her own.



Sister Mary Halder, SOS

Sister Mary assists her on outings and for that she is grateful. “She talks to me about her life experiences and about when she was a young person,” shares Sister Mary. “I know she appreciates the company.”

What has Sister Mary learned from all of these experiences? One concept: Sometimes people will not change or follow our advice no matter how hard we try — and that’s okay.

“[Let people be who they are,](#)” advises Sister Mary who also works with vulnerable people through Fontbonne Ministries’ involvement with Faith+Hub, a new program sponsored by the downtown churches and Fontbonne Ministries.

“I have come to serve” is the motto for the Sisters of Service and Sister Mary elaborates, “I’ve lived my life wishing to be of service to other people.” Indeed, she has done just that — in spades.

An Enlightening Experience

Laurette Quirion's connection to the Sisters of St. Joseph and to **Village Mosaic** has impacted her life in countless ways.

She first encountered the Sisters after a brush with death in 2007. Laurette had Guillain-Barré syndrome and spent a month-and-a-half at St. Joseph's Health Centre.

"Sometimes, I felt desperate and discouraged as I wanted so much to live, as my daughter (I felt) needed me for a few more years," Laurette explains. "Quite a few times, a Sister came and prayed with me and I took in everything she told me and started to heal."

Originally from Lévis, Quebec, Laurette moved to the GTA in 1986 and now lives in Toronto's



Laurette Quirion at Village Mosaic.

west end. Laurette had been unfamiliar with Village Mosaic until her daughter, Julie, brought it to her attention while searching for new activities for her mom.

Laurette's experience at Village Mosaic has been an awakening. "I feel connected to others and, since I love being around people, it has

enlightened and brightened my life quite a lot," she explains.

Laurette is thrilled to have **this new home away from home**. "On Monday morning, when I come to Qi Jong, it boosts my spirits, mind and body."

She enjoys drinking coffee and sharing conversation. "I then go about living my life with more energy, joy, and hope," she says cheerfully.

Encountering Village Mosaic has truly been a rebirth for Laurette who expresses her gratitude and offers a "heartfelt thank you/merci" to everyone involved.

"For years, I was afraid of aging," shares Laurette. "However, now I am able to enjoy the moment and life as it is." Amen.

A Renewal in Clay

At **Studio on the Hill**, Sister Helen Kluge teaches pottery classes, but she also loves giving spiritual retreats. "Retreats aren't like classes," says Sister Helen. "Retreats connect us to God through the medium of clay."



Sister Helen with sculptures of her own and made by retreat participants.

Recently, she held a Studio retreat for religious Sisters from the Sisterhood of St. John the Divine and the Missionaries of the Precious Blood. In a meditative atmosphere with candles and music, she encouraged participants to reach into the clay and find God within it. "**It's a prayer, not with words but in your hands.**"

During this day, participants try to see their faith through imagery and intuition. "When we pray through art, our prayer stops being about specific sentiments and it's renewed into a different form with a new perspective."

While Sister Helen emphasizes that the final product is not the point, participants have been pleased with their sculptures. One person created a circle of figures. "She said that each figure was an image of God's love." Another new sculptress created a beautiful leaf. "It showed God's presence in the smallest of things."

At these retreats, Sister Helen always shows her guests some of her own sculptures: a shoe and sandals to represent a journey of single steps and then a hummingbird. "A hummingbird is always searching for nourishment to renew its body," says Sister Helen, "just as we can always search for God."

A Renewal Through Clothing



Louisa Loucareas helps run the clothing boutique at Mustard Seed.

On Tuesday and Friday afternoons, Louisa Loucareas and two volunteers run the [Mustard Seed](#) clothing boutique where visitors can help themselves to shirts, trousers, coats and more.

“I’m a former manager at The Bay,” Louisa explains, and she draws upon her experience to create an enjoyable ‘shopping’ experience for Mustard Seed guests who also come for meals and activities.

“However, I’d say that the clothes, food and space that Mustard Seed provide are secondary to the real purpose: [to build relationships, to make connections, to be present to one another and to serve others.](#)”

When Louisa isn’t sorting garments, rotating inventory and helping clients, she volunteers at

reception, assists the community kitchen program, and looks for any opportunity to offer an extra set of hands. “I consider it a blessing and a privilege to help out and provide for people’s needs.”

And sometimes, those needs are little things. She recalls one client at Mustard Seed tying a string around his pants; he needed a belt. Another client needed a dress shirt for an art gallery opening. Winter coats and sweaters are in demand during colder months and Mustard Seed is always grateful for donations, especially menswear and women’s clothing in larger sizes.

“When people have the clothes they need for jobs, events or weather,” says Louisa, “they feel renewed: they can live their lives and pursue their goals.”



#GivingTuesday

It’s exciting to report on good news. Our 2018 Giving Tuesday Campaign was a big success. We set a goal of \$8,000 and raised [\\$12,600!](#) The success of this campaign lets us know that our supporters value the work that we do.

Our community of donors is made up of staff members, volunteers, community partners, family, friends and program participants and we are supported in a variety of ways.

For instance, in addition to financial contributions, we receive clothing, craft and sewing supplies, food, toiletries, milk bags for mat making and on Fridays, delicious baked goods for our drop-in programs. Each and every donation makes a difference in someone’s life.

Our volunteers make a difference too. From the very beginning, they have been the backbone of our programs. We are excited to celebrate their contributions in April during Volunteer Appreciation Month.

There are a variety of ways that you can participate in ministry with us as a volunteer or donor. For more information about volunteering, contact Leanne Kloppenborg at [416-467-2640](tel:416-467-2640) or lkloppenborg@csj-to.ca.

To learn more about making a financial contribution to Fontbonne Ministries, contact me at [416-467-2641](tel:416-467-2641) or vmcnally@csj-to.ca or visit our website: www.fontbonneministries.ca.

— Vickie McNally
Director, Development
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Fontbonne Ministries, Sisters of St. Joseph, Toronto, offers diverse programs that are welcoming and inclusive. The charity was founded in 2000 by the Sisters of St. Joseph of Toronto, a community of women who, through their compassionate presence, respond to various needs.

Fontbonne Ministries continues, with the Sisters, their mission of reflecting the love of God and neighbour. The ministries are funded by the Sisters of St. Joseph and individual donations. Thank you for your support!